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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 000695

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/20/2028  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [SNAR](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH FM MADURO -- FARC AND  
DRUGS

REF: A. CARACAS 00684 B. CARACAS 00686

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES  
FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador met May 20 with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro ostensibly to receive a protest note involving an accidental overflight of Venezuela by a U.S. navy aircraft. Instead, most of the meeting focused on U.S. concerns over revelations of Venezuelan ties with the FARC and the need for renewed anti-narcotics cooperation. The Ambassador noted repeatedly that the United States and the international community accepted the laptops as authentic as well as believed there were operational ties between the BRV and the FARC. He urged Venezuela to repair its relationship with Colombia and end such ties. Maduro denied his government had ties to the FARC and said the laptops were planted by the Colombian government. Maduro said he was disturbed by statements from Assistant Secretary Thomas Shannon and U.S. anti-drug Czar John Walters regarding the laptops. Maduro said there were times recently when the BRV had been ready to resume discussing anti-narcotics cooperation, but each time statements by USG officials, such as Walters, prevented Venezuelan action. He also complained about the Ambassador's May 17 visit to a church in a very poor part of Caracas as part of a youth drug program. In press statements following the meeting the Ambassador stressed the USG's concerns over Venezuelan ties to the FARC and the need to renew anti-narcotics cooperation, while Maduro said he was not satisfied with the Ambassador's explanation and alleged a USG plot to undermine Venezuela within the region (something he did not mention in the meeting.) End Summary.

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Meeting with Maduro  
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¶2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolCouns, met with Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro on May 20. The MFA convoked the Ambassador via a diplomatic note to protest the incursion of a S-3 Viking over islands off the coast of Venezuela (Ref A). Maduro said that the Venezuelan government was very concerned with this incident at a time of substantial tension in the region. He noted an alleged Colombian military incursion into Venezuela (Ref B) and said the BRV did not want a repetition of the aircraft incident. Accepting the protest note, the Ambassador said the overflight was accidental and was part of an anti-narcotics mission. He said the pilot had identified himself when in contact with the Venezuelan air traffic control and immediately left the area once he noted the navigational error. He also referred to the Department of Defense statement that thanked

Venezuelan authorities for assisting the U.S. navy pilot. Noting that the aircraft was assigned to a joint taskforce of eleven nations fighting drug trafficking, the Ambassador urged the BRV to rejoin this international effort against drugs.

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Anti-Drug Cooperation  
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¶3. (C) Foreign Minister Maduro said that Venezuela would have liked to discuss increased counter-narcotics cooperation and, in fact, on two recent occasions had been prepared to do so, following the visits to Venezuela by Congressman Delahunt and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson. However, each time, before the BRV could take action, he said, statements by U.S. officials such as Director of the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) John Walters prevented the Venezuelan government from taking any action. The Ambassador noted the importance of combating both drug trafficking and terrorism to both countries as well as the international community and urged Venezuela to resume cooperation. He asked Maduro for assistance in re-exporting a USG funded x-ray machine, intended to be used by the Venezuelan government in detecting drug trafficking. It was now facing bureaucratic delays preventing its re-export after BRV counter-narcotics agencies refused to accept it. The Minister said he would look into the matter and try to provide assistance. The Ambassador also noted a U.S. funded warehouse in Puerto Cabello designed to assist in inspecting shipping containers had been seized by port authorities and was not being used to counter drug trafficking.

¶4. (C) Maduro also complained about the Ambassador's participation in a May 17 event in Petare, a very poor and dangerous part of Venezuela. He said this greatly disturbed the Venezuelan government. The event involved a USG-funded program in a church where a local NGO was conducting a demand reduction program with youth in the area. Maduro said the NGO was not properly registered for involvement in anti-drug programs and was not allowed to receive foreign funding for such a program. (Embassy has subsequently learned that following the event the NGO was decertified.)

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The FARC  
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¶5. (C) The Ambassador stated the USG as well as the international community was now convinced that the laptops recovered by the Colombian military in Ecuador from the FARC were authentic. The international community also accepted the fact that there were operational ties between the BRV and the FARC. He said if there were Venezuelan officials who maintained ties with the FARC without the BRV's authorization the government should distance itself from them. The Ambassador urged the BRV to end these ties and to repair its relations with Colombia.

¶6. (C) Foreign Minister Maduro categorically denied the current Venezuelan government maintained any ties to the FARC except in connection with Colombian government requests to help release FARC hostages. No Venezuelan official had acted without authorization. He said the BRV denied that the laptops were genuine, but rather were fabricated by elements in the Colombian government that would never cooperate with Venezuela. These Colombian elements, he said, were trying to undermine Venezuela domestically and internationally. Maduro said his government was particularly upset with comments by Assistant Secretary Tom Shannon and by Walters regarding the laptops and Venezuelan cooperation with the FARC. He also attacked Interpol chief Ron Noble for allegedly producing a doctored and political document on the laptops. Maduro insisted further that Interpol's own report did not support Nobel's public comments and encouraged the Ambassador to read the entire Interpol document. The Ambassador repeated that the USG and international community accepted the authenticity

of the laptops and again restated the USG's concerns over Venezuelan ties to the FARC, a terrorist organization.

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Bilateral Aviation Security  
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17. (C) The Ambassador said that in addition to cooperation on drug matters, the United States and Venezuela should improve cooperation on more routine, yet still important matters. He noted that for more than two years the USG had been working unsuccessfully with Venezuelan aviation authorities to allow the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to conduct inspections of Venezuelan airports. He noted that even Cuba allows such inspections on as routine manner. Maduro said he would ask his staff to check on the status of the request.

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Speaking to the Press  
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18. (C) Following the meeting both the Ambassador and Maduro spoke separately to the press. The Ambassador indicated the meeting had covered U.S. concerns over Venezuelan ties with the FARC as well as the need to renew counter-narcotics cooperation. Noting that Maduro had presented him with a protest note, he indicated the U.S. military was taking steps to ensure such an incident did not reoccur. Maduro said he was dissatisfied with the Ambassador's explanation of the incident. He also said U.S. actions were part of a U.S. led plot to undermine Venezuela both in the region and domestically. (Comment: During the meeting Maduro alleged plots by Colombia against Venezuela, but made no allegations against the United States.)

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Comment  
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19. (C) The BRV is extremely disturbed by the Interpol validation of the laptops and is looking for any excuse to focus attention elsewhere. They are also clearly concerned with their prospects in the fall state and local elections, including in such previous Chavista strongholds like Petare. They will likely look for further excuses to try to distract domestic and international attention from their involvement with the FARC. It is also noteworthy that Maduro said he was not satisfied with the Ambassador's explanation of the incident, perhaps foreshadowing further BRV actions.

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